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The organization to which I belong, the Inter-Church Commission on Justice and Peace, is an organization dedicated to defending human rights. In our work, we accompany Afro-descendent, mestizo, and indigenous communities that are asserting their rights without the use of violence. We support their efforts in search of truth, justice, reparations, and negotiated political solutions to the internal armed conflict. Currently, we accompany approximately 35 community processes in seven departments in the country.

In order to provide comprehensive accompaniment, we fully inform ourselves of the situation in which these communities suffer violations of their fundamental human rights.

In this way we can affirm that, upon finding ourselves in a scenario where peace dialogues should theoretically be the solution to the events that generate violence, the situation of human rights violations committed against indigenous and Afro-descendent communities continues to be critical. The source of these violations and threats to their human rights is connected to the conflict over land; the determination of land usage; the development model being imposed on their territories; and ignoring traditional customs, ancestral agrarian practices, and relationship to the environment.

In multiple regions of the country, ancestrally inhabited by Afro-descendent and indigenous communities, business sectors, some of them with links to paramilitaries, have carried out or are attempting to carry out agrarian projects such as large-scale monocultures, raising livestock extensively, extracting natural resources, and building infrastructure.

The process of implementing these projects has entailed the threat or direct exercise of military violence prior to and during the development of the projects; the repudiation of the existence of ethnic communities; and the destruction of the ecosystem and environmental richness of the territories.

All this has occurred despite the existence of a law for victims and land restitution, which in theory would attempt to compensate for human rights and territorial violations. In reality the government's position regarding the agrarian problem, which has without doubt been historically the source generating this violence, has been to favor business interests at the expense of the human rights of ethnic and small farming communities.

Symptomatic of this situation is what has been happening for the past 16 years and continues today in the region of the Bajo Atrato in Choco, a traditional home of Afro and indigenous communities.

Beginning in the year 1996 and particularly in 1997, paramilitary groups forcibly displaced these communities, with the complicity of the National Army.

Following the forced displacement, large-scale oil palm, banana, and plantain growers, and cattle ranchers connected to paramilitaries entered the region and began to implement their megaprojects.

Finding themselves in a situation of forced displacement, the communities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó acquired collective titles to their ancestral lands in accordance with the Constitution and Law 70 of 1993.

Given the serious situation of human rights violation, in 2002 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights awarded precautionary measures to those communities. Due to the continuing seriousness of the situation and the urgent need to take measures intended to guarantee those rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights awarded provisional measures to the communities in 2003.

Since then, international organizations and national officials have recognized the direct relationship between human rights violations and the implementation of megaprojects.

As a consequence, the Constitutional Court has, since 2010, ordered the National Government to implement a transparent, participatory, and democratic process of land restitution, that allows for the communities' viable return to their lands, with full guarantees so that they may make use of and enjoy the land in accordance with their customs and ancestral practices.

Since then, the Court has ordered the National Government five times to take necessary measures for this to happen. As it is an emblematic case, the restitution process in Curvaradó has been touted as a successful pilot program.

However, currently, the communities have been re-victimized and a serious risk exists that the restitution process will end up favoring business sectors connected to paramilitaries and continue to develop those agrarian projects that generate displacement.

Despite complaints of these irregularities, the National Government continues with the process.

The vast majority of cases in which Afro or indigenous communities have been victims of human rights violations have received practically no institutional attention. The case of Curvarado is perhaps the most documented, and there are currently orders and national and international legal and administrative requirements in place addressing the issue.

However, the situation of human rights violations persists and paramilitary groups continue in the region. It is necessary and urgent that the National Government demonstrates political will, complies with its obligation to dislodge business sectors connected to paramilitaries, and prevents those groups from influencing the restitution process, so that the legitimate owners can enjoy their human and territorial rights with full guarantees.